

**2006 Town Meeting Member Survey
Advisory Committee
League of Women Voters**

ADVISORY REPORT

Question 4: What suggestions do you have to make Advisory Report easier to use?

- Consider grouping the warrant articles to which there will be no motion together, perhaps at the end. Then the TMM will only have to focus on those for which they will need to make a decision.
- I would like to have some easier way to find the beginning of articles.
- Budget recommendation in the book. Total number of Town employees. Summary of all labor contracts, existing and proposed. Progress on previously approved capital projects and how much of the appropriation has been used to date. Definitions of common planning terms.
- This year's report was the best I have seen. Size and length were excellent. The letter gave a very helpful overview, as did the masterly opening night presentation. The appendices were superb and long overdue.
- Final versions of the motions...it was very confusing at TM—not Advisory's fault, but it does not work for me—trying to understand changes at the last minute, find papers, etc. MLP talks about rate increases as if it's not a tax increase. Advisory can address this more directly. Also, Enterprise funds are town money even if they are in separate legal corporation—we pay for the services—Advisory could do more to raise this.
- There is an extensive analysis for the operating budgets of the Schools and the Enterprise funds. The analysis of the rest of the operating budget is perfunctory, in my opinion, and doesn't dig beyond what the Boards tell the Committee and what was done in previous years.
- Stronger facilitation--people received a lot of liberty to stray from the topic. Good, but could be stronger. Calling the questions earlier—many of the comments on some items were very repetitive.
- I think it is well done and complete. Although some of it is repetitive to what we see and hear at TM, it is very informative and good to have before TM. Perhaps a table of contents would make it easier to find the reports in the back that match the appropriate articles in the front.
- None. It seems like such a huge task, I'm thankful I'm not the one doing it, and therefore feel I have no right to judge those who put in so much time to get it done. Overall the booklet is very helpful. I would like to know when the Town Report will be out, as I enjoy looking at that and have yet to receive.
- It probably isn't feasible, but it was confusing that motions changed considerably after I had spent considerable time studying the report and warrants. There should be a hard and fast cut-off date—the printing of the book—and after that stick with what's been printed.

- This year the Advisory Committee did not do their job asking questions of the various Boards. Many of the articles, in particular the facilities reserve for the schools, was not thought out. The Advisory Committee appeared to only “rubber stamp” the School Committee instead of doing their job of questioning and thinking through the issues prior to presentation to Town Meeting. I think we need a more balanced Advisory Committee. I have no confidence or respect for the Advisory Committee this year. That was not the case in the past.
- Publish it earlier. There is way too much information to absorb in a very short time. This year was especially bad.
- Not sure. Moving to 8.5 x 11 was very helpful. It might be easier to read with some format changes. For example, I notice that paragraphs are justified along both sides of the page. If you were to only left justify, it would help readers as they were going through the information.
- I might put the sources/uses (page 135) as the final page (or the first page) for easy reference—even if it is repeated somewhere else.
- I think it would be helpful to have a “history” section that would identify history on the articles if there is any. For instance, a summary of votes taken in prior years. Maybe not on all articles...but those that have been discussed long term. Similar to the information that Mike Young gave on the WHS project—that framed the voting history for Town Meeting.
- Continue with pros & cons of the committee’s thinking regarding recommendation of an article.
- Maybe less “background” and more analysis from Advisory. Larger format is very helpful.
- A narrative about the subcommittee’s findings while researching the budget.
- Tabs with the article numbers would make it easier to reference during Town Meeting, especially as the articles change or we take them out of order.
- This year’s Report was superseded by more info and changes in the wording of motions so that its content was not wholly useful. Some of this was unavoidable, but in the many cases where there is no decision reached by the Advisory in advance of TM there is little help in the publication. In those cases it might be helpful to articulate what further information is being waited for, so that TMM can be on the watch, and any indication as to how Advisory is leaning.
- Timing makes it difficult to present actual budget in Advisory Report. Changes seem to happen right up to Town Meeting. Could we arrange to have the Report printed later (faster) to allow for a more final product?
- Excellent format (the big book is better). Would have liked another copy of the School Facilities Committee report in the book – I know it’s redundant, but we had so many new TM members – would have been helpful. The e-mail notices with the updates on line were superb—I know that Advisory does not have all the information in order to vote prior to publication—so the fast updates were great. The text in the book is pretty dense—any way to draw a line in between each article—just to close off the info for each? Easier to separate in my mind, and easier to find particular articles when searching through the book. This year’s Advisory explanations were marvelous—non-redundant and very helpful to TM members as they started the discussions. Thanks!

- It is difficult to be flipping through papers and using the report during the meeting. Having everything in the book, or a 3-ring binder to add would make it less cumbersome. I would have liked more detailed analysis done by Advisory to be made available before meeting, especially information done by School Committee on budget and modulars.
- Brevity is good. Easier to read – less of a text format and more in business language. Too long in general and too long specifically for all of the recommendations. Repetitive but, ironically, not enough of an explanation of the debt exclusion process or its implications.
- Make it simpler, if possible.
- I thought it was very easy to use.
- It actually is very helpful. What is somewhat confusing are the handouts. It's hard to know what is new from night to night – until that is announced from the podium. And perhaps separating out the informational from the business would be helpful.
- Make it easier to read and digest.
- I think it's very good as it is.
- My first Town Meeting. I thought it was pretty good.
- I would encourage each committee to provide more detail on why the budget numbers change year to year whether the numbers are a positive or negative. Some committees did an excellent job of explaining the budget variances from last year to this year while other committees did not. Greater transparency of the budget numbers would be helpful. I would also recommend doing a more intense proof-reading of the report, as some of the budgetary numbers were not correct from one page to another. I am sure that a closer look at the report for correctness may not have been completed due to the crunch of getting the book mailed.
- List Articles along with a one-sentence description before all other material.
- The timing of Town Meeting is too early for Advisory to be able to complete their work in support of Town Meeting Members and our citizens. Town meeting should be moved back at least 3 weeks. Town Meeting handouts are not very useful.
- The Advisory Report was great this year—very thorough with a lot of useful information. The problem is the usual each year—so many changes before we get to TM so the Report becomes less useful for some articles and motions.
- It's quite effective as it is.
- Have it correspond to the order at TM.
- Please be sure to publish pros + cons for each article, even if Advisory has not yet voted, or motions not yet final. TMMs need to know the arguments on both sides, at least.
- This was the best Advisory Report to date. It was as complete as expected, understanding that not all information was available nor votes taken.
- More accurate information.
- Any new material distributed at TM should note reference to page in Advisory Report.

- Advisory has made great strides since I started as in TM 7 years ago. Their analysis are much more financially-based. However, I wish they would strengthen their analysis a little more in this area. For example, they supported the request for \$50k (I think) to cover a person until we approved the position later in TM. There was no apparent cost-benefit analysis for this decision. It appeared to be based solely on the assumption that we would approve the position. Another example is the Dunkin Donuts article. There is not relationship between public safety and a CV license. The Advisory Committee should have seen this and recommended that the Selectmen re-draft the article. Many of us approved the article for the wrong reason, and not based on sound judgment.
- Something up front about how the book is organized. Less paper is always good.
- I would like to see more detail on budgets, more information on what makes up each line item.
- Short concise explanations – we get a lot of information at TM and don't have hours to spend on explanation. Depend on Advisory's thoughtful decisions—that's the reason they are on the committee. I've been on it and know how hard they work!
- Presentations less verbose – speakers too long-winded, often redundant.

Question 5. Is there anything you would like to see added to the Advisory Report that was not included this year? Is there anything you would like to see dropped next year?

- Have some easier way to find the beginning of articles.
- Maybe this is a different point, but would you STRONGLY encourage all of the presenters to make their materials available online? I always get questions about TM actions—especially in override years—and I often find that some part of a presentation from the flow helped swing the vote on some of the complicated articles. Gig Babson's charts on OPEB, Mike Young's WHS timeline, and Susan Jablonski's explanation of elementary school population trends several years out are the examples that come to mind.
- I don't think a real five-year financial plan was included. The presentation slides had very little meat regarding anything beyond FY08. I don't think the Guidelines for Conduct of Town Meeting need to be in the book. It should be in the orientation materials for new TM members and since it doesn't change there is not need to reprint and mail it each year.
- I would like to see health care costs added into the various areas rather than lumped into the general pool. If only for reference. So there is a view of total costs. School Committee needs to provide more financial information.
- If there are no motions being made on articles and this is known ahead of time put those together in the book.
- More slides on health care costs. This topic is only going to get hotter each year and will dwarf all others in ten years. Also I want to know the outcome of various collective bargaining agreements with employees in town.

- There needs to be significantly more detail behind the budget figures. In particular a comparison with last year's figures and a calculation of percentage change from one year to another. It is impossible to evaluate budget numbers in a vacuum.
- Issues should be better thought out and many questions answered prior to the report.
- I think the format is good. Would like 5-year financial projections including P&L, expected override, etc. If other Boards don't submit forecast information, have Hans Larsen do his best estimate.
- I think each Board should be required to submit a report so that TM will have an understanding of the strategic plans and initiatives underway within each department. The report might be in a standard format provided by Advisory and each Board would be asked to respond to the same questions like: How do you measure success? What initiatives are underway to control costs and/or improve efficiencies? What new/expanded services would you like to offer the Town? How much would it cost?
- Advisory votes and opinions. Too many Advisory will give their opinion at town meeting!
- Particularly as we continue looking at health insurance and issues over contract negotiations, can there be a one-page summary of all Town employees, all boards—perhaps showing union/nonunion, regular/manager—showing both the number of workers and the pay by board grouping.
- Accurate and complete information.
- More details on 5-10 year plans would be very helpful.
- What about the townwide employee count/total reviewed on an annual basis. And the dollar impact of the benefits and salaries.
- Some of the information handed out later on the retirement debt was helpful and I would have wanted to see it earlier. Same with some of the School and DPW presentations. Then I don't know if the information is available when the book goes to print.
- As mentioned previously—the school facilities report (the Humphrys report) would have been helpful for new TM members. I would consider the new TM members each year and put in, or at least reference with links to the Town website, any reports of significance that should be read by new members. The selectmen's slides on financials were great—in general an excellent book this year.
- I would like specific information about the labor contracts, not just the percentage increase but the total cost of the contract, including lane changes, work conditions, any other benefits. We do not get enough information about the item that drives the total town budget. I think we need to price out all the changes in one contract over the last one.
- More details and a more user-friendly booklet.
- Drop the discussions to a specific length. Too much of the information included is ancillary and distant from the specific issues at hand. It's far too long and too repetitive. Board letters are unnecessary to include in this document. Post online

instead of wasting the money to print. Information about the Town's lawsuit re Dunkin Donuts should have been shared.

- Keep doing what feels right to you...on both questions.
- No, but I would agree with the comment that it is useful to have the Annual Report available at Town Meeting. That is a useful tool.
- Summation of each article in layman's terms. Just a couple of sentences about which Boards and citizens are involved and impact to Town/finances.
- I felt the book was very comprehensive and provided a significant amount of information.
- More history on the various subjects provided.
- The school information doesn't address specifics relative to class size impact on costs (i.e. plus or minus two students) the cost of benefits related to staffing and comparative information relative to Administration costs.
- More comparable town information with respect to taxes and property values.
- Drop the glossary, conduct sections.
- Capital spending budget for next five years is crucial-update-keep in Townsman and focus for all committees.
- I think that every article should have a financial statement of justification – if it involves the encumbrance of Town funds. This is not difficult to do and is an essential ingredient in any business justification. A simple statement of the benefits the Town will derive compared with the incremental costs it will incur would save considerable discussion. It would have made the presentation of the branch library, school, and other requests much easier to follow.
- Just have it sooner or have Town Meeting later!

Question 6: Please provide any other comments about the Advisory Report—both positive and negative—that might be helpful in planning next year's Report.

- It would be good if the five-year financial plan included some commentary and written analysis rather than just the slides.
- It certainly would be helpful to have all recommendations ahead of time.
- Keep emphasizing the big picture and long-range issues, even as you talk about details.
- Don't do it if boards don't have a final motion.
- The larger format works much better than the previous smaller book size. I think it is important to distribute the book to all households. I also think it is important to deliver it by first-class mail to TM members. While the bulk mail delivery was very fast this year, in previous years it was slow.
- Don't start any new articles on the bottom third of each page. Sometimes it's hard to find the article, as it's buried at the bottom of a page. But this is not a big deal if it is too expensive to use the added paper that this recommendation would create.
- The Advisory Committee chair and the Town Manager need to summarize the issues in a more concise manner so people can read the report and shorten the presentation to Town Meeting so it is no longer than five minutes.

- Would like to have it sooner.
- Late changes naturally make the Report's dollar figures somewhat obsolete. Particularly around article 8, when the motion gets put on the screen, can they include the prior year figure as a point of comparison?
- I like the size of the book, the type face was easy to read. I might suggest that we ask to recycle the books next year if the TM does not want to keep them...is the information on disc, so that it could be accessed if necessary?
- I liked the reports that were sent out by the Town Clerk, so that we had the Advisory Committee recommendations as timely as possible. It must have been a great deal of work but it was very helpful.
- The lack of correct information, the late delivery, and in general the inadequate, generic information from Advisory is inexcusable for TM to make informed decisions.
- The main difficulty with the report is that the actual numbers change before Town Meeting convenes. An article expresses the intent and philosophy of the given Board's plan, but can't be exact in the cost, so that Advisory can't have a recommendation before TM begins.
- Demand cost reductions. Do a zero-based budget on one department per year. There are savings in this town—find them—demand them.
- In that format, 8 ½ x 11 rather than the smaller book, it is hard to keep the report open in front of you during the sessions. One thing that is missing in the case of some articles is any useful prior history on the topic. This might help new TMM on subjects like Clovelly Road or Morses Pond management plan when they are priming for the sessions.
- TOOOOOOOOOO long.
- You all did a tremendous and much appreciated job. THANK YOU. I don't think that as town meeting member I can ever work through the entire report without getting dizzy. This year was no exception. Your recommendations were fair and insightful. A great help to me. The Chair's often sympathetic comments were good leads to follow.
- My only suggestion would be to add more historical financial information, to enhance our understanding of how current conditions compare with prior years. It would be very helpful to see 20-30 years of data on just a few key items—total Town spending, net tax burden, fiscal reserves come to mind.
- I would like to have the Town Report during Town Meeting—please pass on to Selectmen. Also please provide the committees that each chair represents. Overall I find the Advisory Report to be thorough and complete.
- Please encourage all boards to provide information on the budgetary areas that show an increase as well as any decreases. It would be helpful if the boards could provide information related to cost efficiencies they may have achieved during the year to reduce expenses.
- Condense.
- Having the appropriate amount of time to have reviewed and voted on virtually all of the motions. There will always be exceptions, this year it appears to be the rule!

- Please have recommendations on all articles before TM.
- The report is great—very thorough. The challenge—no surprise—is all the additional information that is provided at TMM. It gets confusing when you are dealing with multiple versions of the same information.
- Delay printing and sending by a week to get more updated numbers/info.
- I am very happy with the report. My suggestions are comments to further improve this document.
- I found Advisory's comments on warrant articles extremely helpful in interpreting the impact of each article. Maybe more discussion if there was a dissenting opinion(s).
- I found it difficult managing the volume of reprints I received at Town Meeting.
- Very helpful!
- Was away all of March and used Advisory report to address articles but the size of it was overwhelming—too much.
- The whole Advisory approach deals too much on the micro side of the picture at the expense of the macro. It is almost as if we cannot deal with “forest” but must spend hours (and pages) on individual “trees”. I appreciate the hours spent on individual questions and departments, but wish for more time on the large picture and where we as a whole are going.
- Provide more information about where the figures came from and if any attempts were made to use zero-based budgeting!

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS PRECINCT MEETINGS

Question 9: If you attended a precinct meeting, what prompted you to attend? If you did not attend, is there any particular reason why not?

- The timing of the meetings
- Good way to get more information and also to meet new TMMs. Good way to ask questions without taking time at TM. Good way to have discussions in a small group forum.
- I have always attended the Warrant meetings.
- I attended the meetings because 1) if people vote for me, I have a responsibility to them; 2) I think it goes with the territory; 3) the new issues—OPEB for example—are easier to understand if there is an opportunity to get some background. I also think it helps the presenters.
- I wanted to understand key issues and also see other TMMs from the neighborhood.
- In previous years I found the meetings provided basically nothing which wasn't already in writing from Advisory, the Selectmen, or the Townsman.
- Great event. Liked the information and the discussion. Opportunity to efficiently hear the various sides of the items. Prompted by the fact that I was not aware of many of the items and needed to get up to speed.
- They are very helpful and great to ask questions and listen to various opinions.

- Not sure why I attended. It was at a time when I could make it and I was curious about the library, schools and healthcare issues.
- My first year on Town Meeting and I thought it would be helpful.
- Conflicts with other commitments.
- Wanted as much information as possible going in to Town Meeting.
- I had out-of-town houseguests and would like to have attended but couldn't. I think they are a great idea and hope I can make it next year.
- I wanted to hear from the Boards before TM.
- There was no warrant meeting and it was the only time to get an overview with proponents of articles before town meeting. The time also was convenient.
- I was a member of one of the presenting boards, so I attended more than just my own precinct. But I would have attended my own precinct anyhow, to hear early concerns.
- The meeting was precinct focused. The timing worked well with my schedule. It was issues focused and not just going article by article. I learned much more this year.
- Although I had to attend because I was one of the presenters, I definitely would have gone.
- The belief that it would be useful.
- Opportunity to ask questions and have discussion. Informal setting with a small group. A great chance to have more understanding of the Warrant articles.
- Notice was good and I wanted to learn about the issues.
- I will definitely go if they are held again. I was told by many attendees that precinct meetings were much more helpful and informative than the old single warrant meeting.
- Information. It is a dog and pony show to find out what objections will show up at TM. It is not a sincere effort. They should have these meetings to help departments plan for the cuts or get creative ideas needed to meet the budget guidelines. Not build support for the overrides.
- Opportunity to learn and discuss with people before the more formal Town Meeting. Opportunity to hear from town leaders and ask questions.
- Wanted to be knowledgeable and see if anyone in the precinct was vocal on an issue.
- Helpful to hear early questions from fellow TMMs on specific articles, and to see how town officials interact on the subject matter of the warrant articles.
- Chance to ask additional questions of article proponents
- The postcard was helpful. I wanted to hear the speakers and have a chance to ask questions prior to TM. I also hoped that there would be more townspeople there (non-TM members) and would have liked to hear their opinions.
- More informal questioning
- To get more information before the meeting. I think it is a great idea to get as many questions answered before TM so everyone's time is not wasted at TM.
- Felt I should get fully informed.
- Was out of town for my precinct meeting...unfortunately.
- Wanted to discussion and questions about the issues.

- I always like to get as much information as possible on the issues, and this is another vehicle.
- I thought it would be helpful to prepare myself for TM.
- I attended a year ago and found that I received a lot of info/presentations twice—once at the LWV meeting and once at TM.
- I wanted to be prepared and have some background on the financial status of the town before TM and also know which issues might be controversial and require some thought before I vote on each Article.
- I think they are an excellent idea even though I did not attend. I feel relatively well informed and my schedule was busy.
- As a first-time member I wanted to make sure I was prepared.
- As a first year TM member I felt it was important to attend the meeting to ensure I was as knowledgeable as possible about the issues facing the town.
- Interest in hearing and discussing the issues.
- It is part of the job.
- To get more information on specific articles.
- I'm new to Town Meeting and wanted to educate myself as best possible on the issues facing the Town.
- Wanted to get a feel for the questions and comments other TMM had.
- Out of town
- I attended because precinct meetings have been helpful in the past. They are also an opportunity to socialize with TMM acquaintances.
- I've attended the previous LWV meetings to get a "snapshot" of town meeting beginning the following week. The format for a precinct meeting is excellent, complete and informal, encouraging everyone's participation. Highlighting the issues are better than grinding through article by article format as was previously done.
- Wanted to gather as much information as possible on the issues and appreciate the smaller, discussion-oriented forum.
- Non-contested races. Already knew where I stood on some of the bigger issues.
- Wanting to know more and discuss the key financial issues.
- Wanted to get answers to questions on some of the warrant articles and hear other people's concerns.
- As a new TMM I thought it would provide an overview of the process and what to expect, instead we got straight into a preview of key articles. While this was OK, it took me a bit by surprise.
- As a new member, I wanted to get as much information as I could on every issue. It also was helpful to be able to ask questions in a smaller environment.
- Timing in my precinct did not work.

Question 12: Please provide any comments about the LWV meetings or cablecast—both positive and negative—that might be helpful in planning next year's programs. What would you like to see changed? What should not be changed?

- I think this is a good format. Might be good to have one more choice of meeting and to make it clear that you can attend any of the meetings if you can't make the one for your own precinct.
- Continue with last year's format.
- No change
- Would you ask around in advance to see what issues people might want to have covered? I came with a bunch of questions about the CPA projects which I wasn't sure I wanted to pose at TM, but which seemed to be suited to posing in a smaller group.
- I don't know what the purpose of these meetings are, in the context of all the written material already provided.
- Each meeting was different. Can you broadcast the various precincts? Yes, I would watch them to see how various people are learning and what the issues are that are raised.
- Keep the meetings. They are very good.
- I think the meeting was very good. Thorough, thoughtful, and provided a lot of background detail that wasn't included in the Advisory Report or during Town Meeting.
- I think that the meetings were organized and well run.
- I liked the explanation of OPEB and hearing other people's objections and concerns. It helped me figure out what additional info I needed before making a decision.
- As a board member, it was helpful to hear some concerns early and work to have clearer responses for TM. There certainly seemed to be more questions in this format than what has occurred at the last full town warrant meetings.
- Thought it was a great format. Recommend doing it again next year.
- I think we might have benefited from having even smaller groups. Next year if the first session is to be cablecast, then we need to make sure that we have the best presenters, but on the whole I thought they were highly successful.
- One more different date for a group to gather for discussion of certain articles.
- It's probably impossible, but it would be good to avoid discussion of issues that end up not being the subject of a motion.
- Quality of cablecast continues to be poor...makes it hard to follow...keep precinct meetings...consider holding one session in early/mid budget season, followed by one closer to Town Meeting...would be helpful to understand issues being discussed prior to final decision...consider doing as Needham has done and offering a "get to know your town government" series...might encourage people to get involved.
- I appreciated the focus being on the critical issues, not a review of all the issues. I appreciated, and would welcome again, the short addresses provided and then the question and answer sessions. Just about the right length of time; and I liked the arrangement by precincts. It was much better than the warrant meetings.
- Do not have cable
- I liked the smaller settings and the multiple options for attending. I know it's harder on the speakers, but it's hard to set one day and have everyone attend then

too. I was in the last meeting and they seemed to have worked through any kinks (speakers talking too long, etc.). Very well run. Great opportunity for questions. Speakers were not defensive. New TM members got to ask a lot of questions that helped give them background, rather than taking up time on TM floor.

- Have all the detailed background data available for those who would like to review it.
- Format is too constrained. 2 – 3 minutes by the Boards is too short to discuss articles and limited subjects prevented full discussion (e.g. schools was just on the modulars.) Change the format or don't have them at all.
- Candidates' Night is most helpful. More precinct meetings are needed when it comes to understand the override and the school budget.
- I thought the format that focused on the key warrant articles was very good. Paul Criswell did a good job of keeping to the allotted time.
- The selection of items to be highlighted is key to the degree of help provided. I thought the LWV did a good job. Palm Sunday p.m. was not the easiest time for such a meeting, however.
- I thought the smaller groups were much more helpful than previous years. The additional times also made it easier to attend one. Big improvement over previous years!
- I would like to see a small portion of time at each meeting devoted to general questions about the entire warrant.
- I think the meeting could have been longer, and included other items. Did you poll TMM to see what questions they were interested in discussing at the meetings?
- The meeting was very helpful to gain a better understanding of the key issues being presented to Town Meeting. I would not change the format as the meeting covered the important issues. If possible, I would recommend that more time be provided to the Boards to address the "major" issues.
- Better resolution of the picture presented.
- The very tight time constraints don't leave much room for meaningful dialogue. It seemed like most of the citizens who did ask questions had specific agendas.
- More complex articles should be given more time. Each article was given the same amount of Q&A, which didn't seem to reflect the differing complexities and levels of interest.
- Thought the precinct meeting was very helpful. Fellow participants were able to ask questions in a low-key setting, providing the opportunity to gain additional insight into the various articles. Will definitely go next year. Time well spent.
- It's a great opportunity to get informed and bat ideas around and see the lay of the land.
- Good to have two precincts together—gives broader view.
- I loved that they were on TV.
- Many people commented VERY positively on the precinct meetings. I support them.

